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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 PRAGUE 000999

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: MISSILE DEFENSE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: WHAT WE
NEED TO GET TO YES

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W. Graber for reasons 1.4 b+d

11. (C) Summary and comment: Our effort to win approval for a missile defense (MD) radar in the Czech Republic faces numerous obstacles. Politically, despite a recent victory on a controversial economic reform package, PM Topolanek's government does not yet have the votes in hand to approve the MD agreements; public opinion remains strongly against the facility, and the government has so far done a poor job of making the case for the radar. Externally, the Czech-U.S. effort on MD is hampered by doubts about Congressional and Democratic support, uncertainty about NATO's position, and, to a lesser extent, shadows cast by Russia's reaction. And we hear an increasing number of voices here who question if the USG's heart is really in this fight.

12. (S) Summary and comment continued: In the end we can win the vote in parliament. In time-honored fashion, the government will strike a back-room deal, including with opposition MPs if (as is likely) this proves necessary. We need to help set the stage. We need USG focus in five areas. First, working to win a strong NATO statement on MD at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit. Second, developing a public diplomacy effort that focuses primarily on the reality of the threat. Third, effectively rebutting questions about Congressional and Democratic support for MD and the European site. Fourth, finding some way to show that the MD facility will generate new scientific or R&D cooperation, And fifth, more visible signs that we value the Czech Republic as a partner and are serious about MD. Looking ahead to negotiations next month, we need to prepare for two eventualities: squaring our desire to conclude talks quickly with the Czechs' to delay ratification until after the Bucharest Summit; and accommodating Czech requests for language they see as necessary to win key parliamentary votes. End summary and comment.

13. (C) As we prepare for the second round of negotiations on the two MD-related agreements, and come out of what has been a relative summer lull, it is appropriate to take stock of where we stand in the MD effort. The process in the Czech Republic got off to a rocky start: last summer's site surveys coincided with gridlock following the inconclusive June 2006 elections; the presence of MD on the national agenda was one of many factors that made it difficult to form a government. The USG decision to formally propose the radar came on the very day in January that the Topolanek government won a vote of confidence, forcing the new government to make MD its first order of business. We are lucky that Topolanek and his party are solid supporters of MD. Unfortunately, the other two parties in the coalition are, to varying degrees, skeptical or ambivalent about the U.S. proposal, and the opposition parties are only too happy to follow public opinion polls -- consistently showing 60-70% opposed to MD -- to gain political points.

14. (S) The Topolane government, despite the enthusiasm of many senior officials, has done a poor job of handling the public debate. This is due in part to this government's standard operating procedures, but also because of conflicts within the coalition. MFA and MOD officials appear to have devoted more time to preparing for negotiations than to preparing for a public debate. The GOCR mantra from the start was transparency, with the government leaking the proposed site for the radar within days of receiving our request for negotiations. Unfortunately, it had no plan in place for how to deal with local concerns. Most of the government officials put forward to deal with the public (like Deputy PM Vondra and Deputy FM Pojar) were seen as arrogant and quickly became a liability. The one public official who appeared to have the right touch, Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, had to reduce his public engagement because it was becoming a liability for the Greens, who had brought him into the cabinet. Meanwhile the uniformed military, who enjoy more local respect than politicians, chose to go into hiding on MD, and their civilian leadership has been unable to draw them out.

15. (S) In the absence of a coherent public strategy, the opponents have generally dominated the debate. The "No to the base" campaign quickly emerged as an effective organizer that aggressively spread half-truths and rumors about the base and tapped into strong Czech hostility to foreign troops on their soil (the country hosted Soviet forces for over 20 years after 1968, including many at the planned radar site). Local mayors, mainly socialists and communists, grew

PRAGUE 00000999 002 OF 004

increasingly vocal in their complaints about lack of hard data on health and environmental concerns; the antics of these small-town mayors have dominated the media for months. The government's response was to appoint Tomas Klvana as Government Coordinator for MD Communication, with a mandate to handle public and parliamentary relations. While the June appointment was initially seen as a positive step, Klvana has had little success so far. He has been dismissed by most of the mayors in the region, who insist that they should be dealing with true government officials. He has been given only limited staff. To date he appears to have done nothing to prepare an effective parliamentary strategy. His major achievement was forcing the MOD to complete a long-pending independent health assessment of the radar, released on August 17, which helped quiet some local concerns. The problem appears not to be Klvana himself (although his youth is not an asset, nor the fact that he is on leave from an international tobacco company), but that the government has given him no support, preferring to keep quiet on the controversial issue. President Klaus earlier this month criticized Klvana by name; no one in the government said anything in Klvana's defense. Last week FM Schwarzenberg responded publicly to Austrian criticism of MD, marking the first statement on MD in many weeks by a cabinet-level official.

16. (C) The USG also shares some of the blame. In hindsight it is clear that we should have been planning with the Czechs a public relations strategy in advance of our offer to negotiate; an immediate PR campaign that highlighted NATO and health issues could have disarmed some of the critics. Nonetheless, earlier this year the USG was clearly leading the public relations effort: our comprehensive website was an admired source of information; the Ambassador visited the region frequently, and the first Czech government meeting with local officials came about at our initiative. Worried about getting too far in front of the GOCR, we reduced our profile and focused on supporting Czech efforts. In hindsight, this was probably a mistake. We also have failed to effectively shape Czech perceptions on the Congressional

funding question.

Political context

17. (S) The public debate would not matter so much if the political situation were more favorable. The coalition has exactly half the seats in the lower chamber, and relies for support on two "renegades" from the Social Democrats. PM Topolanek's ODS is the only party in parliament that firmly supports MD. Their support is based both on a belief that the threat is real, and a strong desire to see U.S. military assets in the CR as a way to cement the transatlantic relationship. Topolanek's two coalition partners are less reliable. The Christian Democrats generally support the concept, but without any enthusiasm, in keeping with their more populist orientation. One Christian Democrat, who broke ranks on last week's economic reform bill, has become more vocal in questioning MD in the past week. The Greens are even more divided. While some of their grassroots instinctively oppose the plan, the leadership (more moderate than most European Greens) has said they could support MD if the bilateral initiative does no harm to NATO and the EU and ultimately becomes part of a NATO system. The government assumes that they may not get all the Greens and Christian Democrats to vote in favor. Which is why they (and we) have focused so much attention on the Social Democrats, led by Jiri Paroubek. The strategy is to make sure that Paroubek has the flexibility to make some sort of deal when the time comes, allowing some number of his deputies to vote in favor.

18. (C) Another political factor is the presidential election due in February next year. The president is elected by both chambers of parliament, a process that involves a great deal of horsetrading. In 2003 President Klaus was only elected in the third round of voting. He wants to be re-elected, and is already lining up deals. Klaus has not been a major player in MD. He is, at best, a lukewarm supporter. While he wants to maintain close relations with the U.S., he is also wary of favoring a project that has such high negative ratings. Klaus has been careful to balance his rare public statements, although his comments earlier this month -- in which he criticized Klvana and spoke of the need to listen to the opponents of the radar -- indicate that we cannot expect any help from Klaus on MD before the election. Perhaps more important, the government wants to avoid any MD "deal" in parliament getting mixed up with a presidential "deal" and therefore wants to be sure that the vote on the MD agreements doesn't happen until well after the presidential election.

PRAGUE 00000999 003 OF 004

19. (C) Finally, there is the political question of whether or not the Topolanek government will last. The government last week won its first major legislative battle, passing a package of controversial economic reforms. While the victory is a positive sign for the government's stability, and for their ability to pass unpopular legislation, there are still reasons for concern. Topolanek faced strong opposition from within his party, and was forced to cut numerous last-minute deals to ensure passage. While he will likely not face such opposition from within his party on MD, he will surely face opposition from coalition partners. Topolanek was less effective winning coalition support, as demonstrated by the one Christian Democrat who refused to support the bill. Despite the legislative victory, it is certainly possible (although not likely) that the government could collapse in the next year. This would not necessarily be bad news for MD. The most likely scenario for a new government is a grand coalition between Topolanek's Civic Democrats and Paroubek's Social Democrats. Once back in government, we expect Paroubek would be much more reasonable on MD. But it is difficult to make any firm predictions.

¶10. (S) The political trends are not encouraging. We still believe that a yes vote is possible. But it will take more work on our part to put in place the conditions to make that happen. That includes aiming for some drop in the high percentage of the population opposing MD: opposition is broad, but apparently not deep, and a positive trend could make it easier to gain swing votes. We suggest the following five themes to guide USG efforts in the coming months, largely in the public arena, but also in our negotiations.

First, NATO is critical. Support for the collective security alliance runs throughout the political spectrum (obviously excluding the Communists) and public opinion. Both the Greens and the Social Democrats have focused on NATO: they want to see the U.S. radar in some way locked into NATO architecture, and they want to be sure that the debate over the U.S. MD assets in Central Europe does not cause any irreparable harm to the alliance. Statements made at the Prague and Riga Summits have not gone far enough to answer critics (and recent statements by SYG de Hoop Scheffer, while very positive, are also not the same as formal declarations).

The GOCR is now focused on the spring 2008 Bucharest Summit and wants to see a strong statement on MD that will be sufficient to win the support of Greens and Social Democrats.

We need to begin working with Czechs now on defining and achieving that goal. Obviously an offshoot of this is that the Czechs do not want the parliamentary vote to take place until after the April 2008 Summit. We need to find a way to square this with our desire for quick conclusion and approval of the agreements to demonstrate progress to Congress.

A corollary is that Russia also matters, but much less than NATO. Russian saber rattling has the effect of making Czechs think that a radar isn't such a bad thing, even if it isn't directed at Russia. The Czechs agree with us that Russia needs to be treated with respect and taken into consideration, but Russia does not have veto over Czech security decisions. It is important, however, that the USG continue to coordinate closely with the Czechs on our negotiations with Russia: debrief on our talks, and prevent any surprises.

Second, we need to keep focused on the threat, and to make sure that Americans are not the only voices heard on this. Thoughtful Czech skeptics of the MD plan do not believe that the threat from Iran is real. We have to overcome the presumption, lingering since the Iraq war, that we are overstating the actual threat. We need to make sure that the public and private comments of visiting USG experts present credible evidence of the threat, not just presume its existence (the same goes for briefings presented to VIP visitors in the U.S., notably Paroubek when he travels this fall -- Paroubek has said that being convinced of the threat will have the greatest impact on his position). Even better will be non-American voices. As above, a collective NATO voice is the most important. But statements from respected figures in other NATO and EU member countries will go a long way to turning around the perception that the threat is not real. One useful target would be a German social democrats, given the relative influence the party has with its Czech counterpart.

Third, we must do a better job overcoming the presumption

PRAGUE 00000999 004 OF 004

that the current Congress does not support MD in general, and the European sites in particular, and that a Democratic victory in 2008 would mean a reversal in plans for the European sites. There is a strong sense here that some in Congress want to see the radar built in the CR, with no interceptors in Poland. This is a political non-starter here, as one of the strongest points in favor of the system is that it will protect the CR and many other NATO allies.

We have hopes that upcoming Congressional visits (Codel Franks this week, Codel Tauscher next month) will help clear up confusion. But it is important as well for Washington agencies handling MD to be pro-active in explaining (or giving the embassy information to explain) the meaning of various shifts in MD funding. Congressional committee votes that merit mention only in the specialized press in the U.S. are often front page news here. It is critical to our effort to demonstrate that this project is a USG priority that we stay ahead of the news cycle on the funding question.

Fourth, PM Topolanek has made repeated references to his hope that the MD project can spur greater scientific and R&D cooperation between the two countries. The Czechs are much less focused than the Poles appear to be on the economic impact of MD. Indeed, there is a concern that both the Czech and U.S. government need to avoid anything that could be seen as a "bribe" to win the deal. Nonetheless, the government wants to be able to point to some benefits, besides a contribution to the common security. This explains in part the Czech fixation on moving ahead with MDA on a Framework Agreement for cooperation. We should be exploring other ways (such as trade missions) that the USG can help to spur new investment or other cooperation on R&D.

Finally, we need to demonstrate to the Czech public and politicians that the USG takes this country, as well as this initiative, seriously. This takes two forms. First, treating seriously Czech concerns in the negotiating process, and recognizing the risks that would come from the government having to present to parliament a package that is seen as second rate. The Czechs have repeatedly told us that they want a SOFA that resembles our agreements with western European allies, not those with Bulgaria and Romania. The public and parliament are fixated on questions of what sort of data we will share with the GOCR and what access Czech military will have to the radar; FM Schwarzenberg last week made reference to the U.S.-UK military partnership as what the Czechs are striving for. We need to recognize these concerns, and very strong Czech pride in general, as we work to negotiate agreements that can win approval. The other side of the equation is making sure that the USG as a whole "walks the walk" when it comes to demonstrating that we don't take the Czechs for granted. Opponents of the deal will be quick to label Topolanek and his government as American lackeys. We need to give the government the ammunition to say that is not the case. The President's visit here made a huge impact, but this needs to be a sustained effort. For example, Topolanek wants to visit the U.S. before the year is over: he should, and a meeting with the President will be crucial. There has not been a bilateral visit to the CR by a Secretary of State for many years: there should be, not so

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much to talk about MD, but to engage the Czechs on a broader global agenda.

Next steps with Czechs

111. (S) In addition to honing the USG approach and message on MD, we need to take a more active approach with the Czech government. Their effort has lost momentum over the summer; the promise of a more focused, strategic Czech approach that we saw in Klvana's appointment has not panned out (Klvana now promises that the public campaign will be "re-launched" in mid-September). Some of the momentum will return in the fall, thanks in part to an active travel schedule in both directions. But we do not believe this is sufficient. The Czechs need to take a more systematic approach to winning the public and parliamentary debates; senior government officials need to engage in the effort and not leave Klvana hanging with no support; and the military needs to step up to the plate. The embassy is devising a strategy for engagement with public and the parliament; we will coordinate this with Klvana and with Washington; we also want to coordinate more closely with Embassy Warsaw and USNATO. We will also be

meeting with senior officials to pass our concerns about the drift on MD. In the end we need a coordinated approach that builds coherently towards the goal of "yes" votes in parliament. And this requires the full engagement of both Prague and Washington to achieve.

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